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ABSTRACT

Suggestions are provided to help community colleges disseminate their publications as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible, by taking advantage of relevant postal regulations. After looking at the prohibitive costs of first-class mailings, the paper considers second- and third-class bulk mailing options, beginning with a comparison of the costs of mailing 1,000 college catalogs via first-class mail ($1,580), second-class mail ($92.23), second-class mail sorted by carrier route ($74.23), and third-class mail ($136.17). The use of third-class bulk mail is discussed first, with focus on how to get a bulk mail permit, the types of permits and their costs, and content and size requirements for third-class mail. Second-class mail, which was set up primarily for the mailing of periodicals, is discussed next in terms of its appropriateness for the mailing of various types of college publications. Information on permit costs, regulations, and mailing services is provided. Next, second- and third-class mail are compared in terms of preparation requirements, flexibility, costs, and the differences with respect to address corrections and levels of treatment of undeliverable mail. Finally, the advantages of second-class, non-profit, in-country, carrier-sorted mail are reviewed. (EJV)

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"DOING THE POST OFFICE TWO-STEP"

OR

"HOW NOT TO HOLLER UNCLE"

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Presentation for CASE
Advancing Two-Year Institutions Conference
December 9-11, 1986

"Doing the Post Office Two-Step"
or
"How Not To Holler Uncle"

Outline of Presentation for
CASE Advancing Two-Year Institutions Conference
December 9-11, 1986

I. Use of Third-Class Bulk Mail

   A. Getting the permit

      1. Types of permits
      2. Cost

   B. What can be mailed

      1. Content requirements
      2. Physical requirements

   C. Cost

II. Use of Second-Class Mail

   A. Making application

   B. Types of publications

   C. Second-class postage rates

III. Preparation of Second- and Third-Class Mail

IV. Comparison of Second- and Third-Class Mail

   A. Flexibility

   B. Cost

   C. Address corrections

V. Using Second-Class for Mass Mailings

   A. Qualification

   B. Advantages

   C. Cost

Congratulations! You've just produced a captivating catalog, an artistic annual report, a beautiful bulletin, a seductive schedule. Writers, designers, artists, photographers have labored for months to make your publication convey the message you want to the audience you want. Now, you must answer the question of how to get that message, physically, to that audience.

Think back to Communications 101 and the basic communications theory of source, message, channel, receiver -- SMCR. This presentation concerns the C -- the channel. And if you're typical of most people in institutional advancement, the channel will be the United States Postal Service. What I'd like to talk about today is how you can make postal regulations work for you instead of against you -- how to mail your publications in the most efficient and cost effective way possible.

Now, the most efficient way will be to mail first-class. No muss, no fuss, no minimum requirements, no ZIP code sorting, no special labels -- just slap on the stamp and let her rip. But, while first-class mailing is very little trouble, it takes very much money. My college's catalog is typical -- six-by-nine inches, 200 pages, weighs a little less than half a pound, costs 66 cents to print. But that 66-cent catalog costs $1.58 to mail first-class. Not very cost-effective.

What's the answer? Bulk mailing. But what kind of bulk mailing -- second-class or third-class. In the next few minutes, I hope to give you an idea of what the difference is between second- and third-class mail,

when you can and cannot use them, when you should and should not use them, and how one particular form of second-class mailing can save your college a bundle.

Let's get right to the bottom line. Suppose you want to mail out 1,000 catalogs, the same one I mentioned earlier. Assume all the mailings are within your county. The tab for mailing first-class would be $1,580. For third-class, $136.17, and for second-class $92.23. And if your mailing can be sorted by carrier route, the second-class bill falls to $74.23 -- about half of the third-class rate. Sounds interesting, doesn't it.

Two years ago, I would have told you to mail everything you possibly could at second-class, non-profit rates. Those rates were too good to be true. In fact, that's just what Washington thought, and they've been edging up steadily. So the decision whether to mail second- or third-class is one you might want to weigh carefully. I mean that literally, because the weight of the piece can make a big difference.

First, what can be mailed third-class? Really, just about everything your publications office turns out -- schedules, catalogs, flyers, announcements of concerts. But, there are a few basic requirements:

1. Each piece has to be the same size.

2. Each piece, with some exceptions, needs to be the same weight.

This can provide a nasty, little surprise when your printer -- as ours once did -- does a job on two different weights of paper without telling you.

3. Each piece must say the same thing; that is, it cannot be individualized in any way. You cannot mass-mail grade reports or time

permits for registration. You mail mass-mail a letter -- notification of acceptance or academic probation, or whatever -- as long as the letters say exactly the same thing and have a salutation such as "Dear Student." If the letter has an individual's name and address on the inside, it does not qualify.

4. You must have at least 200 pieces or 50 pounds.

5. The pieces must be sorted and sacked according to ZIP codes and bulk mail centers.

That's third-class mail, intended to cover the bulk mailing of printed matter. What about second-class?

Whereas third-class covers all sorts of printed matter, second-class is set up primarily for the mailing of periodicals, which the Domestic Mail Manual defines as "a publication which is published at a stated frequency with the intent to continue publication indefinitely." Later in the same paragraph we find that a periodical "must exhibit continuity form issue to issue. Continuity may be evidenced by serialization of articles or by successive issues carrying the same style, format, theme or subject matter."

That takes in such periodicals as alumni magazines and faculty/staff newsletters, but it doesn't stop there. The manual also says that periodicals include "any catalog or other course listing . . . issued by any institution of higher education . . . " That opens up all sorts of possibilities.

Here are some more requirements. The periodical must be published at least four times per year. Primary distribution must be made before that of each succeeding issue. The periodical must be published under the same title.

With this in mind, here's what my college did -- and what your's can do. We lumped our catalog, our three credit schedules and our three non-credit schedules into a single second-class permit.

How, you ask can items as varied as these be considered issues of one periodical. Look at the requirements again. Is it published at least four times a year? Yes. Does it consist of catalogs or other course listings issued by an institution of higher education? Yes. Is it published under the same title? Yes. We came up with a very catchy title --"Tarrant County Junior College" in one size of type and, in slightly smaller size, designations such as "Fall Schedule of Classes," "1986-87 Catalog" or whatever. Is primary distribution made before the next issue comes out? Yes. Like most of you, we mail catalogs all year long, but the largest single mailing is done just after publication. Therefore, a catalog mailing in February, eight months after publication and with five issues having intervened, is perfectly legal.

But wait a minute. These things aren't the same size. Nowhere in the postal regulations does it say they have to be. These things don't go to a list of subscribers or even to the same people issue after issue. They don't have to. But you mail a lot more of some schedules than you do others. Makes not difference to the post office. We mass-mail our fall schedule to every household in the county -- about 410,000 last fall. The summer continuing education schedule, on the other hand, goes to about 10,000 people. But you might have to wait for weeks to get 200 requests from people who want a particular schedule. In second-class mail, there is no minimum amount. You could conceivably do a second-class mailing

consisting of one copy. This, however, would hardly endear you to the people at the post office who handle the paperwork.

Let's look at another example. The drama department has a mailing list and puts out information on each play. Most would print flyers and mail them third-class, but what if the department knew that it would have four, five, six or however many productions per year? What if, as is usually the case, these productions fell in the same months every year? What if the department titles its flyer "The Dramatist" or "Stage Door?" Each "issue" could give the information on the upcoming play and thus qualify for second-class rates.

How much does it cost to get a permit? Third-class mail requires a $50 per year fee, plus and extra, one-time charge of $50 if you want to have a third-class mailing indicia. That's the little thing you print in the upper right-hand corner that says "Non-Profit Organization, U.S. Postage Paid, Fort Worth, TX, Permit No. 492." It's by far the easiest way to go and beats sticking on 200 or more third-class stamps.

A second-class permit carries a one-time fee of $220 and generally is harder to get -- lots of forms to fill out. But don't worry about how to do the paperwork. Do what I did -- call another nearby college that already has a second-class permit and study the photocopies of their forms to see how they did it. Getting your second-class permit requires some time, and you'll have to mail the first issue or two at a higher rate while the application is pending, but once it's approved, the difference between that higher rate and normal second-class rates will be refunded to you.

The method of payment is usually the same, but whereas in third class you may choose to have an account at the post office of which postage is deducted, in second class you must have such an account.

Whether you go third-class or second-class, getting the publication or periodical ready for the post office is -- I won't kid you about this -- not easy. Everything has to be sorted by ZIP code or carrier route or the first three-digits in the ZIP code. Then you have to make all these little stacks which must contain at least six pieces but can be no more than four inches high. Then you put rubber bands around the stacks and put these little, colored dots on each stack, and then you have to place the bundles in sacks just so (no more than 70 pounds. Uncle doesn't want hernias in the workforce) and then label the sacks according to regulations.

What I'm saying is that it can be a royal pain. But here's the good news. It doesn't have to be your pain. There are people whose business it is to do mass mailings for other people. Let them do it. They have the machines and the expertise. Of course, they're going to charge you, but you may find that it's cheaper when you compare the cost of the mailing service on one hand with the person-hours a college employee would spend. Example: that mass mailing of 410,000 pieces coast us $2,000 to have prepared. I don't think we could have done it in-house for less, and even if we could have, where in the world could we have put almost half a million schedules while we were working on them?

Now, back to that bottom line. How much does it cost in postage to mail second-class vs. third-class?

Third-class, non-profit rates are as follows. If your piece weighs less than 3.4783 ounces, you are charged per piece. The basic rate is 8.5 cents. The rate for pieces pre-sorted into five-digit ZIP codes is 7.1 cents. The rate for pieces pre-sorted by carrier route is 5.5 cents. If the piece weighs more than 3.4783 ounces, a per-pound rate is added to the per-piece rate. The per-pound rate is 25.3 cents plus so much per piece -- 3.0 at the basic rate, 1.6 for a five-digit ZIP code sort, no per-piece charge for carrier route sort. There is a provision, however, that the total charge per piece -- pound rate combined with piece rate -- cannot be less than the 8.5, 7.1 or 5.5 cents which apply to pieces of lesser weight.

Are you totally confused by now? Maybe an example is in order. Remember our 1,000 catalogs, each weighing 7.6 ounces? Let's assume that we can sort them all by five-digit ZIP code. Okay, here we go. The 1,000 pieces at 7.6 ounces each weigh 475 pounds. At 25.3 cents a pound, that's $120.17. Add to that the per-piece rate of 1.6 cents. One thousand times 1.6 cents is $16. The total is $136.17, a total per-piece rate of 13.6 cents.

Now assume you have a class schedule weighing 2.3 ounces. Since that's less than 3.4783, the pound rate doesn't apply and it's simply 1,000 copies times the five-digit ZIP rate of 7.1 cents, or $71.

If you're still confused, I'm sorry to say that second-class rates are more complex. It's still a combination of per-pound and per-piece rates, but the rates are different in-county and out-of-county. And the out-of-county rates vary depending on (1) how much advertising, if any, the publication has and (2) the geographical area to which it is mailed. Say

your alumni magazine is 50 percent advertising. The portion that is non-advertising will be charged at a rate of 8.5 cents per pound, no matter where the magazine is sent. The advertising portion will be charged anywhere from 11.3 pounds for zones 1 and 2 to 28.3 cents for zone 8.

In-county rates are far simpler -- a flat 9.1 cents per pound and either 4.9 cents per piece or 3.1 depending on whether or not you can sort by carrier route.

Hopelessly lost yet? Don't worry about it. It is complex, and that's all the more reason to let the mailing service deal with it. But it's a good idea to know enough to get a ballpark figure so that you know whether to go second-class or third. Cost-wise, it almost always will be cheaper second-class. Look at this table which gives the cost for mailing three different periodicals.

	Weight per piece		
	0.7 oz.	2.3 oz.	7.6 oz.
Class			
First	$220	$560	$1,580
Second (in-county)	$52.98	$62.08	$92.93
Second (half-half)	$58.85	$67.65	$96.79
Third	$71	$71	$136.17

This is for 1,000 pieces, no advertising, sorted by ZIP codes but not by carrier route. Generally, second-class is going to be a little cheaper than third and a whole lot cheaper than first. A word of caution, though. If a high percentage of your mailing list is out-of-county, third class may

be cheaper. This might apply particularly to colleges who mail an alumni periodical all over the country. Or it might also apply to a community college whose district covers more than one county. But, if your clientele is pretty much confined to one county, second-class is going to be the best buy.

Both second-class and third-class mailing provide you an opportunity to keep the addresses on your mailing lists up-to-date through address corrections. The difference is that such corrections are mandatory on second-class mail. This means that if a piece is undeliverable, it is returned to the mailer, either with an address correction or a notation that it is unforwardable. This can get expensive at 30 cents apiece, but it provides a good way to keep track of your publics -- especially your extremely mobile young alumni. If you choose to mail third-class, you may elect to use an address correction endorsement as frequently or as infrequently as you wish. If your publication is quarterly, you may choose to clean up the list on one mailing per year. Unlike second-class, there are all sorts of levels of what you can have done to undeliverable third-class mail, and it depends on whether or not the piece weighs more than an ounce.

Let's assume that you're mailing a schedule that weighs more than one ounce. Here are your options:

1. Put "Do Not Forward" or nothing at all on the piece. Nothing will happen. All undeliverable pieces will be thrown away.

2. "Address Correction **Requested**" -- Nothing is forwarded, but you are notified either that it is unforwardable or of the new address. The charge is 30 cents each.

3. "Forwarding and Return Postage Guaranteed" -- Mail is forwarded. If it cannot be forwarded, the piece is returned to you with the reason for non-delivery. The charge for this is a weighted fee for each piece returned -- commonly about 60 cents.

4. "Forwarding and Return Postage Guaranteed. Address Correction Requested" -- A combination of Nos. 2 and 3. Everything that can be forwarded is forwarded and you are notified of the new address, at 30 cents apiece. Unforwardable pieces are returned at the weighted fee.

5. "Do Not Forward. Address Correction Requested. Return Pöstage Guaranteed" -- Nothing is forwarded. Anything undeliverable comes back to you, either with the new address or the reason for non-delivery.

What's best? It depends on what you're sending to whom. If it's a mass mailing to everybody in a ZIP cord, you probably aren't interested in having it forwarded and could care less about address corrections. If its to your graduates, you probably want the correction.

You've all heard that experience is the best teacher. Here's a lesson that our college learned the hard way. As I mentioned, we mail our fall schedule to every household in the county. When we first set up the schedules and catalogs under second-class, we simply couldn't believe how much money we were going to save. We had reckoned without the mandatory address correction for second-class mail. We mailed out about 325,000.

The mailing service provided the labels with the addresses. Do you realize how many of those were bad addresses -- vacant houses or apartments? I'll tell you how many -- about 11,000. If you've ever been hit by an 18-wheeler you'll have some idea of how I felt when I got a call from our business officer, who told me the post office had returned a big bunch of our schedules. I walked into the hall, and there were three, large hampers full of undeliverable schedules -- each one at what was at that time the going rate of 25 cents each.

Fortunately for me, the difference between second- and third-class rates at that time was so large that we still saved money, but not nearly as much as we thought we would. The next year, however, we got around this problem. Here's how.

In the unlikely event the Vatican calls on me to nominate someone for sainthood, it will be a man named Jimmy Redding, supervisor of mail classification at the Fort Worth post office. After the aforementioned fiasco, Jimmy called me and said that we were in a situation in which there were no winners. Getting all those schedules back was costing us money, but the money we were paying didn't cover the trouble it cost the post office. But, in looking over the regulations, he had found something that would make everybody happy. We were, were we not, a state-supported community college? We were indeed, I replied. In that case, he said, paragraph 122.412 of the Domestic Mail Manual might apply. I quote: "The individual name and street address or post office box number may be omitted form the address on official matter mailed by agencies of the Federal

Government and any state, county, or municipal government . . . when distribution is to be made to each stop or possible delivery on . . . carrier routes. The following forms of address may be used: (1) Postal customer (2) Residential customer (3) Business customer."

Consider what this means. The second-class, non-profit, in-county, carrier sort rate is the lowest of all of the rates offered by the United States Postal Service. Plus, material is delivered only at good addresses. You don't get any of them back. How much does that save us? On a mailing of 400,000, you can expect about 3 percent bad addresses. At 30 cents each, that's $3,600.

Talking about Jimmy Redding brings me to the final point I want to make. We were lucky. We had a postal supervisor helping us who genuinely wanted to help us, while at the same time doing what was best for the post office. I don't know how many are like Jimmy, but at the risk of oversimplifications I'll predict that there are three basic types of people you'll encounter in the bulk mail sections at the post office.

First, there are those like Jimmy who will go out of their way to help you. Second, there are those who really have no great interest in you but who will make sure you do it right. I have a theory on how to deal with these people and that is to grovel. You will be completely at his or her mercy anyway, so you might as well throw yourself on it. Plead ignorance, plead insanity, but get that person to show you step-by-step how he/she wants it done. This, remember, is the ONLY really correct way.

If you are extremely unlucky, you will run into the third type -- the person who is not interested in you AT ALL and for whom you are only making

more unwanted work. Instead of working with you, this person may well work against you, finding every rule and making every rule interpretation in such a way as to prevent you from doing what you want to do. If you're stuck with type No. 3, you might be able to appeal to a higher authority. But even if you win, it may be a case of winning the battle and losing the war. You've still got to live with that person on the local level who can -- all under the rules -- make your mailing life miserable.

I believe the type No. 3 is a small minority. I also believe in the tooth fairy, but that's another story. What I'm saying is that it's worth a try because of the tremendous savings that are possible. Go to your post office, pick up some material on second- and third-class mail, try to understand it. You won't, but then go and sit down with the bulk mail people and tell them what you want to do. It can really pay off.

CASE

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"Doing the Post Office Two-step, or How Not to Holler Uncle" (postal regulations)

Directed to all professional levels

Bill Lace is native of Fort Worth Texas, and a fifth-generation Texan (a fact worth mentioning only since this is Texas' sesquicentennial year).

He received his B.A. in journalism from Texas Christian University in 1966 and his M.A. in journalism from East Texas State University in 1977.

Presently, Mr. Lace is a doctoral candidate in Higher Education Administration at North Texas State University.

Mr. Lace has been in the institutional advancement profession for 16 years. During the last five he has been the Director of College Relations at Tarrant County Junior College in Fort Worth. His responsibilities include handling media relations, community relations, marketing, and publications.

A dedicated CASE junkie, Mr. Lace is presently serving on the District IV Board of Trustees as treasurer and on the national Board of Trustees as trustee at-large for two-year colleges and he chairs the CASE Committee on Two-Year Colleges.

Hobbies: making beer, drinking same

Ultimate goal: To get out of college before 17-year old son gets in.

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